ALLEGORIES OF UNION IN IRISH AND ENGLISH WRITING, 1790–1870

Politics, History, and the Family from Edgeworth to Arnold

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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK www.cup.cam.ac.uk
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA www.cup.org
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

First published 2000

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in Baskerville 11/12.5pt [VN]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloging in publication data

Corbett, Mary Jean, 1962–
Politics, history, and the family in Irish and English writing, 1790–1870 / Mary Jean Corbett.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0 521 66132 3 (hardback)
1. English fiction – Irish authors – History and criticism. 2. English prose literature– Irish authors – History and criticism. 3. Politics and literature – Ireland – History – 19th century. 4. Politics and literature – Great Britain – History – 19th century. 5. Literature and history – Great Britain – History – 19th century. 6. Literature and history — Ireland – History – 19th century. 7. English literature – 19th century – History and criticism. 8. Ireland – Intellectual life – 19th century. 9. Ireland – Relations – England. 10. England – Relations – Ireland. 11. Nationalism in literature. 12. Imperialism in literature. 13. Ireland – In literature. 14. Family in literature.

PR8807.P64 C67 2000
828'.80932417–dc21 00-086658

ISBN 0 521 66132 3 hardback

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CHAPTER ONE

Public affections and familial politics: Burke, Edgeworth, and Ireland in the 1790s

Just after William Fitzwilliam arrived in Dublin in January 1795 to take up his short-lived post as Lord Lieutenant, Edmund Burke wrote a letter to a member of the Irish Parliament in which he posed his fundamental concern of that revolutionary decade: "My whole politicks, at present, center in one point; and to this the merit or demerit of every measure, (with me) is referable: that is, what will most promote or depress the Cause of Jacobinism?"[1] In Burke's view, as in Fitzwilliam's, it was the redress of catholic grievances that would stave off revolution in Ireland: as he wrote further on in that same letter, "I am the more serious on the positive encouragement to be given to [catholicism], (always however as secondary [to the Church of Ireland]) because the serious and earnest belief and practice of it by its professors forms, as things stand, the most effectual Barrier, if not the sole Barrier, against Jacobinism" (*Writings and Speeches* 663).

Tolerating catholicism would have strategic political advantages for the emergent empire: as Burke had written in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), all right-minded Englishmen of whatever creed would "reverently and affectionately protect all religions because they love and venerate the great principle upon which they all agree, and the great object to which they are all directed. They begin more and more plainly to discern that we all have a common cause, as against a common enemy."[2] Successfully enlisting catholic Irishmen in that "common cause" would require viewing their religious practice as no disability, but as a mark of their fitness for imperial citizenship in the struggle against France. In his holy war against Jacobinism, Burke thus sought to redraw the lines so as to bring dissenting elements in Ireland within the pale of English liberties from which they had been excluded.

On another front, from the ideological position most closely associated with Burke's radical antagonist Thomas Paine, unmet Irish demands ranging in nature from parliamentary reform to catholic

emancipation to republican separation ultimately issued in the bloody Rebellion of 1798, led by the United Irishmen with the support of the catholic Defenders. In how this alliance developed and broke down over the course of the decade, we can also see an effort at work to construct a counterhegemonic "common cause." Crossing sectarian lines, the United Irishmen allied themselves with France in direct opposition to rule from Westminster, and to what Burke himself was to scorn as "the protestant ascendancy": those men who profited from the official patronage wielded by the English executive at Dublin Castle and who sought to defend their position against encroachments from parliamentary reformers and radical emancipationists. However little else he might have shared with them, Burke would no doubt have concurred with the disaffected rebels of 1798, whose bloody "year of liberty" he did not live to witness, that it was the failure of the ascendancy to rule in any interest other than its own that constituted the true scandal of late eighteenth-century Ireland.

It is within the context of revolution and counterrevolution that we can best understand Burke's political writings on Ireland and Jacobinism in the 1790s. As Seamus Deane rightly captures Burke's point of view, Ireland was to him "that part of the British polity most vulnerable to the radical ideas of the Enlightenment and revolution precisely because it had never known under British rule the virtues of the ancient civilization that had collapsed in France"; Burke thus undertook a "campaign in favour of a relaxation of the penal laws with the aim of thereby attaching Ireland more closely to England and reducing Ireland's vulnerability to the French disease."[3] It is my contention, moreover, that Burke's gendered vision of the patriarchal family as paradigm for – and agent of – the orderly society undergirds the ideological work to which Deane refers. Destroyed in France, revered in England, and undone in Ireland by the operation of the penal laws, the patriarchal family has a crucial role in both Burke's anti-Jacobin arguments and his prescriptions for "attaching" catholic Ireland to England.

My first aim in this chapter is to examine the place that the family occupies in Burke's thinking on Jacobinism and Ireland, analyzing the gendered rhetoric of the prophylactic against rebellion which the *Reflections* seeks to mount. By revisiting that text, as well as Burke's critique of the penal laws, from a feminist point of view, I aim to demonstrate that a gendered conception of the patriarchal family, and of women's and men's roles within it, lies at the heart of Burke's project for remaking Ireland in an English mold.

Burke's quarrel with the French Jacobins in the *Reflections* arises from their repudiation of the traditional sociopolitical order, their challenge to the venerable institutions that had provided a fiction of continuity over time and an ideological bulwark against change. Early Jacobin sympathizers in England, the immediate targets of Burke's counterattack, sought to draw inspiration from events in France for political and social movements at home, and particularly for dissenters' efforts to achieve the measure of equality that had been denied them. But Burke casts their egalitarian rhetoric in nationalist and protectionist terms, as an illegal and unnatural transfer of goods: "We ought not, on either side of the water, to suffer ourselves to be imposed upon by the counterfeit wares which some persons, by a double fraud, export to you in illicit bottoms as raw commodities of British growth, though wholly alien to our soil, in order afterwards to smuggle them back again into this country, manufactured after the newest Paris fashion of an improved liberty" (*Reflections* 22–23). For Burke, Jacobin principles are not "raw commodities of British growth," but alien goods, "counterfeit wares." Having declared French imports injurious to true British interests, he sets out to demonstrate that the established principles of government and society are indigenous historical products of British national life; in so doing, he sets in motion the flow of associations between domestic and political forms of order that runs throughout the *Reflections*.

Burke borrows his primary metaphors for political society from the aristocratic idiom of the landed estate and patrilineal succession, which naturalizes the link between property and paternity. Over the course of the *Reflections*, natural order is represented as familial just as the family comes to appear naturally ordained. The interweaving of one symbolic reference with others makes it nearly impossible to separate distinct strands, and this is precisely Burke's rhetorical aim: as Ronald Paulson traces the progression, in "[moving] from the organic growth of the plant (the great British oak) to the countryside, the country house and the georgic ideal of retirement, the estate, the aristocratic family and its generations, the inviolability of inheritance," Burke naturalizes the social order.[4] In this way, Burke justifies existing arrangements – for the transmission of property as well as for the continuance of the extant form of government – by a single principle, as what he calls "an *entailed inheritance*" (29). All Englishmen, dead or alive or yet to be born, have an equal claim to it: "The very idea of the fabrication of a new government is enough to fill us with disgust and horror. We wished at the period of

the [1688] Revolution, and do now wish, to derive all we possess as *an inheritance from our forefathers*. Upon that body and stock of inheritance we have taken care not to inoculate any cyon alien to the nature of the original plant" (27–28). Against innovation, revolution, and the hybridity they breed, Burke proposes patrilineal inheritance as the only natural and just means of insuring economic and political continuity and reproducing it over time. As J. G. A. Pocock argues, in "[making] the state not only a family but a trust . . . an undying *persona ficta*, which secures our liberties by vesting the possession of them in an immortal continuity" and so "identifying the principles of political liberty with the principles of our law of landed property," Burke represents the nexus among family, property, and civil society as immemorial and indissoluble.[5]

Burke's concern here is to furnish "a sure principle of conservation and a sure principle of transmission, without at all excluding a principle of improvement" (29); while he does not rule out political change and economic expansion, the two watchwords of the rising bourgeoisie with which he is in some respects allied, Burke yet hopes to control the momentum of both by restraining them within the firmly established bounds of what he calls a "family settlement" (29). He draws most explicitly on the affective relations of the familial realm for his model of how to contain the anarchic energies he associates with both the revolutionary French and the rising bourgeois English, "the men of ability": "we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relation in blood, binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties, adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections, keeping inseparable and cherishing with the warmth of all their combined and mutually reflected charities our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars" (30). Within this framework, to rise against the polity would be equivalent to parricide; far better, then, to treat both head of family and head of state with a respectful affection that proceeds from one and the same source. Burke's naturalization of ties to patriarch and monarch, as Steven Blakemore establishes, is invested with the power of "family affections" and makes any assault on those ties appear to be an unnatural, alien, un-English act.[6]

Particularly in its emphasis on the affective charge that should inform a citizen's response to home as well as state, Burke's intertwining of familial with political relations in reconfiguring English patriarchy can be read from a feminist perspective as part of a wider cultural reimagining of relations among men and women in this period. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall argue, a characteristically middle-class

ethos came to depend on an articulation of gender and class that redefined the family as an autonomous political, economic, and psychological unit: "forms of property organization . . . framed gender relations through marriage, the division of labour and inheritance practices"; moreover, in their reading, "the structure of property can be regarded as a powerful 'relational idiom' in the creation of both gender and class, placing men as those with power and agency, women as passive dependants."[7] Whereas some historians, following Lawrence Stone, have argued for an historical shift in the function of the family from economic to affective group, Davidoff and Hall illuminate the interrelation of the affective with the economic, pointing out the ways in which bourgeois families consolidated their socioeconomic power through a redefinition of gender roles and practices. Providing a critical tool for reevaluating concepts of property and inheritance, this lens brings into view their gendered elements.

For example, in Burke's case, we see that the idea of inheritance entails both economic and political transmission, operations that ostensibly involve and concern only men; materialist feminist analysis enables us to recognize, however, that the "relational idiom" functions both as a norm for the lived experience of men and women and, in the ideological register, as a powerful warrant for the gendered character of that experience. Gary Kelly explains that "since women in both upper and middle classes continued to serve the economic function of transferring property from one man to another," women were also charged with "restraint of the erotic 'passions' ensuring the stability and integrity of the family as a property trust continuing through the generations."[8] Thus while women are not considered as political actors – excluded from Burke's "we," and by no means included among "*our forefathers*" – they are profoundly implicated in the familial paradigm he employs, both as the locus for "family affections" and as the embodied and embodying agents of inheritance. Even so, women's crucial role in the metaphorical and literal reproduction of the family is largely written out of Burke's account of transmission and inheritance, and that absence should alert us to the gender politics of Burkean thought.[9] For while Burke presents the family as a neutral figure embracing all within its grasp, his historicist defense of English liberty rests on some latent assumptions about the nature and character of women and men, conceived ahistorically as fixed and unchanging – yet also liable to extreme unsettling in the revolutionary context.

These assumptions have been well documented in the work of both

Blakemore and Paulson, who agree on the centrality of the gender binary to Burke's politics as well as, in Isaac Kramnick's psychobiographical terms, to his own personality.[10] In its basic form, Burke's binary opposes masculine activity to feminine passivity in much the same way that Davidoff and Hall characterize emergent middle-class gender ideology. From his earliest published work, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757), Burke associated masculinity with energy and terror, femininity with quiescence and a pleasing delight.[11] And he rhetorically registered his outrage at the French Revolution in terms drawn from an available vocabulary of gender/class polarity, particularly visible in the celebrated section of the *Reflections* concerning the French royal family. But helpful as Blakemore and Paulson are in identifying the conventional class and gender associations of Burke's rhetoric, they do not employ gender as an analytic category in their readings; by contrast, my concern is not so much with how femininity figures in the *Reflections*, but in what ways and for what purposes it is written out, or written in, as a force in maintaining or disturbing the Burkean status quo. Burke's gender politics are predicated on effacing the relation of women to property and, more generally, to the public sphere: indeed, as the political theorist Linda M. G. Zerilli effectively argues, "what comes apart in the French Revolution . . . is a gendered semiotic code," in a collapse of the stabilizing gender/class boundaries on which so much of Burkean thought depends.[12]

Patrilineal inheritance, as I have noted, is central to Burke's thinking about the reproduction of political and economic forms; he represents it as sure and certain, while revolutionary change is dangerous and unpredictable in its outcomes. Yet inheritance can never be as sure as patriarchal thinkers (or putative fathers) would like insofar as its proper functioning may be subverted by the difficulties of determining paternity or the misrepresentations of impending maternity.[13] Burke's confidence in the security of hereditary transmission depends, in other words, on the tacit assumption of marital chastity among women, who act as the unacknowledged ground for and guarantors of familial, economic, and political legitimacy. In this light, his concern about the illegitimacy of "counterfeit wares" and alien cyons betrays a specifically gendered, culturally pervasive anxiety: that no principle of transmission can be fully secure if feminine fidelity is not maintained.

Not surprisingly, then, Burke figures the worst excesses of the revolutionaries as a threat of uncontained female sexuality that could destroy

all traditional ties. This threat can only be rebuffed by the renewal of those "two principles" that have inspired "all the good things which are connected with manners and with civilization": "the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion" (69). Burke connects the laxity of French morals with the overthrow of paternal right:

> All other people have laid the foundations of civil freedom in severer manners and a system of a more austere and masculine morality. France, when she let loose the reins of regal authority, doubled the license of a ferocious dissoluteness in manners . . . and has extended through all ranks of life, as if she were communicating some privilege or laying open some secluded benefit, all the unhappy corruptions that usually were the disease of wealth and power. (33)

As the "austere and masculine" give way to "a ferocious dissoluteness," the "disease" of aristocratic manners – often associated in Burke, as in the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, with sexual license – spreads throughout the body politic, infecting all ranks; if not explicitly labeled as such, the effeminate or feminine character of the carriers of this plague is yet suggested. Throughout the *Reflections*, Tom Furniss argues, Frenchwomen are thus "depicted as having abandoned their femininity and modesty . . . such violations of 'proper' gender roles and behavioural patterns are both endemic to and emblematic of a general breakdown of political order."[14]

Even more overtly, in a later work, *Letter to a Noble Lord* (1796), Burke specifies the threat he perceives in sexual terms, drawing on misogynous Miltonic and Virgilian representations to represent female license:

> The revolution harpies of France, sprung from night and hell, or from that chaotick anarchy, which generates equivocally "all monstrous, all prodigious things," cuckoo-like, adulterously lay their eggs, and brood over, and hatch them in the nest of every neighbouring State. These obscene harpies, who deck themselves, in I know not what divine attributes, but who in reality are foul and ravenous birds of prey (both mothers and daughters) flutter over our heads, and souse down upon our tables, and leave nothing unrent, unrifled, unravaged, or unpolluted with the slime of their filthy offal.[15] (*Writings and Speeches* 156)

Unchecked by a manly morality, this monstrous feminine principle commits all manner of outrage, from shitting on the innocent to laying eggs in others' nests, and so undermines the security of hereditary transmission; "reproduction outside marriage destroys property and all other forms of masculinist self-representation," as Zerilli comments, "by destroying the legal fiction of paternity," or at least by exposing it as a fiction.[16] Burke's images thus portray the pollution and desecration incumbent on feminine freedom as an affront to civilized domestic life –

so central to the literal and symbolic reproduction of masculine hegemony – while simultaneously representing feminine promiscuity as a threat to sociopolitical order.

Burke's insistence on the importance of the family, then, has a double valence: it is necessary, along with the state, for the restraint of masculine energy and desire; and it also provides a brake on feminine sexual appetites – prone, if unchecked, to adulterous and therefore revolutionary excess. From this perspective, the celebrated passage in the *Reflections* concerning Marie Antoinette reads not as an anachronistic defense of chivalry, but as a very contemporary plea for a requisite discipline in sexual and familial relations, conceived as central to the maintenance of order. For part of what Burke fears in the Jacobin revolt is the unfixing of the proper bounds of feminine and masculine sexual restraint just at the moment when those bounds are more crucial than ever:

> Never, never more shall we behold that generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart which kept alive, even in servitude itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defense of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise, is gone! It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honor which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled whatever it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness. (66–67)

If "that generous loyalty to rank and sex" – "the unbought grace of life, the cheap defense of nations, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise" – should disappear in England as it has in France, all distinctions would thereby be lost. Here Burke avows the central role of masculine heterosexual discipline in creating and maintaining social, political, and national order: without "that subordination of the heart" and "that chastity of honor" – without, that is, an ideological apparatus for carefully controlling and sublimating men's sexual energy – social life threatens to devolve into an uncivilized chaos of anarchic forces and desires. And if the feminine proprieties – "the pleasing illusions," "the sentiments which beautify and soften private society," "all the decent drapery of life" (67) – that should restrain masculine energy were to be cast aside, either by men or by women themselves, then the result in Burke's estimation would be the destruction of civil society.

Thus Burke's emphasis on securing a "family settlement" of property and government also involves settling the affective and libidinal forces at work among women and men in and on particular individuals, be they husbands, wives, or children. Centering his affections on his family, a

father–husband simultaneously finds an appropriate channel for desire and supports the necessarily hierarchical and fixed system of benefits and privileges that structure the social order; just as "no Prince appears settled unless he puts himself into the situation of the Father of a Family," as Burke wrote during the Regency crisis, no lesser man can be truly loyal to his sovereign unless he acquires the same curb on his appetites.[17] A proper mother–wife, who lays no eggs in any nest but her own, similarly requires near kin to accommodate her libidinal investments; thus she will come to represent in her own person "the pleasing illusions," the principle of womanhood worthy of a glorious respect, while insuring the reproduction of familial life at a number of different levels. The ideal Burkean family, in short, stands as the embodiment of "public affections," which "create in us love, veneration, admiration, or attachment," "required sometimes as supplements, sometimes as correctives, always as aids to law" (*Reflections* 68): and while "the law is male," as Terry Eagleton aptly remarks, "hegemony is a woman."[18] On the sanctity of this private entity rests public, national, and imperial security.

The prophylactic rhetoric of the *Reflections* therefore depends on representing the best means of English resistance to the French disease as the patriarchal, property-bearing family, construed as the natural and proper school for attaching individuals first to their own "little platoon" (41), and second to the broader family of the state. In this light, Jacobinism can best be understood as the principle of opposition to that order which undoes the hierarchical, unfixes the passions, and unsettles the family and the nation – "the dissolution of civil society as such," in Eagleton's words, "and thus a subversion of the very notion of government through the affections."[19] What France threatens to become in its breaking of the patriarchal compact, Burke is determined England shall never be: but closer to home, the sister kingdom presents an even more striking model for how the subversion of order that Burke associates in the *Reflections* with English radicalism and French Jacobinism has already produced chronic disaffection in Ireland.

In his late apologia, *Letter to a Noble Lord*, Burke portrays his duties to Ireland and England as different in degree, but not in kind. With regard to Ireland, he writes that "my endeavour was to obtain liberty for the municipal country in which I was born, and for all descriptions and denominations in it." But Britain had a larger claim: "Mine was to support with unrelaxing vigilance every right, every privilege, every

franchise, in this my adopted, my dearer and more comprehensive country" (*Writings and Speeches* 167). His stance here as elsewhere demonstrates what Thomas H. D. Mahoney has called Burke's "imperial mentality," whereby the interests of Ireland, however significant in their own right, were all the more important insofar as they accorded with – or deviated from – those of the "more comprehensive country" of Great Britain.[20]

An active, multifaceted Irish opposition was, however, articulating those differences of interest with increasing volubility in Burke's time. The elements in Ireland contending for political control in the latter half of the eighteenth century included those at Dublin Castle who distributed patronage and "managed" the Irish parliament; after 1782, those Irish parliamentarians anxious to wrest a broader measure of autonomy from England; an emergent urban catholic bourgeoisie centered in Dublin who sought full access to the political process; and the presbyterian dissenters of Ulster who suffered under disabilities of their own. Spurred on by the example of the North American colonists, patriot groups within Ireland such as the Volunteers, originally formed as a militia group in 1774, protested both excessive taxation and unequal representation. And the parliamentary agitation that issued in the repeal of Poynings' Act in 1782 gave the Irish parliament greater freedom to legislate for Ireland, but without essentially altering the fact of direct British rule in the form of the Dublin Castle executive.

If landed protestants in parliament had their grievances against the imperial power, so, too, did these less powerful constituencies: prosperous middle-class dissenters and Dublin catholics formed extra-parliamentary associations such as the United Irishmen and the Catholic Committee to push, respectively, for parliamentary reform and catholic emancipation. Most seriously, prospects for an alliance between these groups, each excluded from full citizenship, alarmed both the landed protestant minority in Ireland and the British government in the 1790s, especially in view of the threat from France. And each dominant force moved in its own way – and in its own interests – to stem the tide, the ascendancy by calling for repression and the government by granting concessions to catholics, albeit incomplete and grudging, in the relief bills of 1792 and 1793.[21]

Even as Irish opposition to English rule grew in some quarters, Burke maintained the position on the proper relation between his two countries that he had articulated as early as 1773, in his "Letter to Sir Charles Bingham":

> . . . if it be true, that the several bodies, which make up this complicated mass, are to be preserved as one Empire, an authority sufficient to preserve that unity, and by its equal weight and pressure to consolidate the various parts that compose it, must reside somewhere: that somewhere can only be in England . . . So that I look upon the residence of the supreme power to be settled here; not by force, or tyranny, or even by mere long usage, but by the very nature of things, and the joint consent of the whole body. (*Writings and Speeches* 488)

From an imperial point of view, Burke could imagine only one possible effective center for power and ultimate authority: in the empire, as in the patriarchal family, one head alone could prevail, "by the very nature of things," yet its rule must be such that it could secure "the joint consent" of the governed. Burke's imperial mentality, that is, was predicated on the same hierarchical gendered thinking that structured his approach to other forms of governance, be they national or familial.

Within this version of the imperial family of Great Britain, Ireland figures as a subordinate – perhaps a son or a sister, but more typically a daughter or a wife – whose dependence would be tempered by its treatment at the hands of a just, manly, but not tyrannical father/husband/brother. As part of that family, Ireland was entitled to a limited autonomy, but subject ultimately to its superior's sovereignty, both for its own benefit and Great Britain's: as Burke wrote in "A Letter on the Affairs of Ireland" (1797), his last extant work, "the closest connexion between Great Britain and Ireland, is essential to the well being, I had almost said, to the very being, of the two Kingdoms . . . Ireland, locally, civilly, and commercially independent, ought politically to look up to Great Britain in all matters of peace and of War" (*Writings and Speeches* 675). A vital factor in the empire, Anglo-Ireland was said to control its own sphere of affairs, yet had of necessity to bow to the dominating patriarch who sanctioned and circumscribed that control in its own imperial interests.

But Burke's comments to Bingham also register the significant barriers to Irish recognition of English supremacy, for from the point of view of more than one dissenting Irish interest in the 1780s and 90s, English sovereignty over Ireland was read precisely as a matter of "force, or tyranny"; nor could "long usage," by which he refers to the doctrine of prescription, really be said to apply to a country in which conquest had to be perennially renewed, a point that Burke himself would make at critical moments in the 1790s. Within Ireland, multiple constituencies pursued their often conflicting agenda; indeed, the historians Thomas Bartlett and Kevin Whelan have each argued that this was

exactly the way Pitt's government wanted it, in effect playing off one interest against another so as to keep all elements in a perpetual state of internecine crisis.[22] Securing "the joint consent of the whole body," divided as it was by class, creed, and national identifications, could never have been an easy task, even under the best of conditions. But by focusing specifically on the particular impediments to catholic citizenship, as did the British government from the 1770s, Burke attempts to demonstrate that the use of force and tyranny against catholic Ireland, far from securing anything like "joint consent," had produced instead ongoing disaffection.

Penal laws passed during the reigns of William and Anne, ostensibly to prevent the spread of catholicism, not only entailed restrictions on religious training and worship, but also, and no doubt more importantly in Burke's eyes, constrained economic opportunities and property-owning for members of the faith: "though garbed as a holy war against popery," as Theodore W. Allen puts it, "this policy was governed mainly by considerations of capital accumulation."[23] Debarred from the franchise, magistracies, army and navy commissions, some branches of the legal profession, the university, and most other forms of education and advancement at home and abroad, catholic men were thus essentially excluded from all the institutions that helped to produce and shape the masculinist ideal of the landed gentleman, even if the laws were unevenly enforced and, significantly, "in no way hindered the steady growth of a middle-class mercantile elite."[24] Many of the laws were repealed during Burke's lifetime: in 1778, catholics were enabled to inherit and sell land on the same basis as protestants; by 1792, catholic men could be called to the bar as barristers and solicitors, were permitted to intermarry with members of other faiths, and granted the right to education; in 1793, the franchise was given to forty-shilling freeholders, and catholic men were admitted to army and navy commissions and to university. They were still, however, excluded from parliament and from certain high offices within the government, with the great mass of catholics of course remaining entirely unenfranchised. Burke's opposition to this restrictive legislation, however, which took written form as early as 1765 in his unfinished "Tracts relating to the Popery Laws," centers not on its inherent injustice to an oppressed class, but on his sense that Ireland could not be reformed or conciliated unless English practices of familial inheritance and domestic affection, so crucial to his

analysis in the *Reflections*, were made equally available to catholics.[25] His antipathy to the penal laws stemmed, that is, from what one might anachronistically call their Jacobinist indifference to familial politics, to the proper settlement of power within the father's hands.

In the *Reflections*, Burke proffers two uses of history for the present: we may read it as "a great volume . . . unrolled for our instruction, drawing the materials of future wisdom from the past errors and infirmities of mankind"; or "it may, in the perversion, serve for a magazine furnishing offensive and defensive weapons for parties in church and state, and supplying the means of keeping alive or reviving dissensions and animosities, and adding fuel to civil fury" (124). Whereas he takes the former as his tactic in the *Reflections*, Burke consciously deploys Jacobinist "perversion" in making his case for securing Irish consent in the revolutionary context: as Whelan concludes, Burke's arguments, "conservative in an English setting, became subversive once transposed to the narrow ground of Ireland."[26]

In his first *Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe* (1792), Burke brandishes weapons from the seventeenth-century magazine of Irish history, representing 1688 as the moment at which England consolidated its rule over Irish catholics by brute force, when "the Protestants settled in Ireland, considered themselves in no other light than that of a sort of a colonial garrison, to keep the natives in subjection to the other state of Great Britain" (*Writings and Speeches* 615):

> The new English interest was settled with as solid a stability as any thing in human affairs can look for. All the penal laws of that unparalleled code of oppression . . . were manifestly the effects of national hatred and scorn towards a conquered people; whom the victors delighted to trample upon, and were not at all afraid to provoke . . . every measure was pleasing and popular, just in proportion as it tended to harass and ruin a set of people, who were looked upon as enemies to God and man; and indeed as a race of bigotted [*sic*] savages who were a disgrace to human nature itself. (*Writings and Speeches* 616)

Connecting this most recent colonial conquest of Ireland to the penal laws enacted on its heels, and showing both to be among "the effects of national hatred and scorn," Burke rereads the historical event celebrated in the *Reflections* as the great stabilizing moment of English liberty from a very different perspective in an Irish context. The so-called Glorious Revolution here marks the moment at which the catholic Irish majority was forcibly excluded and violently coerced by the few: "I shall not think that the *deprivation of some millions of people of all the*

rights of the citizens, and all interest in the constitution, in and to which they were born, was a thing conformable to the *declared principles* of the Revolution" (*Writings and Speeches* 614). Although Burke did seek, as Deane contends, to achieve "the reconciliation of the Irish Catholic majority to the Whig settlement,"[27] it is even more significant in my view that Burke dates "the true revolution" in Ireland to 1782, when "the Irish parliament and nation became independent" (*Writings and Speeches* 617), and not to 1688. By this move, Burke suggests that the hegemony he celebrates in England is as yet unestablished in Ireland and, moreover, that its growth has indeed been actively discouraged.

In place of that old relation between conquered enemy and conquering power, Burke proposes one that speaks to the interests of the present as he articulates the current status of the catholic majority:

> . . . to be under the state, but not the state itself, *nor any part of it*, is a situation perfectly intelligible: but to those who fill that situation, not very pleasant, when it is understood. It is a state of *civil servitude* by the very force of the definition . . . This servitude, which makes men *subject* to a state without being *citizens*, may be more or less tolerable from many circumstances: but these circumstances, more or less favourable, do not alter the nature of the thing. The mildness by which absolute masters exercise their dominion, leaves them masters still. (*Writings and Speeches* 598)

Or, as he more succinctly puts it in his *Letter to Richard Burke* (1792), "new *ascendancy* is the old mastership" (*Writings and Speeches* 644). In the 1790s, granting catholic Irishmen the right to sit in parliament as well as to elect its members, on the same (limited) terms as citizenship was extended to (some) Englishmen, would make them "part of" the state: no longer "mere subjects of conquest" (*Writings and Speeches* 599), but persons capable of fully and freely contributing to the empire, economically and politically. The movement from subjection to citizenship, from dominance to hegemony, from the brute violence of seventeenth-century coercion to the willing affection of eighteenth-century consent, is what Burke seeks to promote.[28] Arguing from natural law in the "Tracts relating to the Popery Laws," he asserts that while the people "are presumed to consent to whatever the Legislature ordains for their benefit" (*Writings and Speeches* 454), "no one can imagine . . . an exclusion of a great body of men . . . from the common advantages of society, can ever be a thing intended for their good, or can ever be ratified by any implied consent of theirs" (455). Repealing the penal laws would release Irish catholics from "subjection," which Burke equates with "the most shocking kind of servitude" (*Writings and Speeches* 642) in the *Letter to*

Richard Burke, and so encourage growth of the "public affections" which their implementation had stunted. He seeks, that is, to close the gap between "civil servitude" and full citizenship – a gap most visibly pernicious, in his view, at the level of family relations.

Burke consistently criticizes the penal laws on the grounds that they undermine a father's authority over his children and his estate. Instead of primogeniture, by which an eldest son inherited his father's land and other property, the penal legislation had mandated gavelkind (repealed in 1778), whereby an estate was divided equally among all of a man's male children, thus obstructing the consolidation of assets in one son's hands.[29] For the seventeenth-century English, replacing primogeniture with gavelkind had been a strategic move in securing the subjection of conquered catholics, preventing them from rebuilding their economic and political power as landholders. As Burke sympathetically puts it in the "Tracts," by these laws "the Landed property of Roman Catholicks should be wholly dissipated; and . . . their families should be reduced to obscurity and indigance [*sic*], without a possibility that they should be restored by any exertion of industry or ability, being disabled . . . from every species of permanent acquisition" (*Writings and Speeches* 437), with "industry" and "ability," balanced by the "permanent acquisition" that primogeniture enables, being precisely the Burkean recipe for the stable family/state. "Deprived of the right of Settlement, no person who is the object of these Laws, is enabled to advance himself in fortune or connection by Marriage" (*Writings and Speeches* 437), thus shutting off another route for catholic men to consolidate landed power and the cultural and political authority that accrued to it.

In their economic and political effects, the laws also determined familial relations in other ways that Burke found highly suspect. For example, a further penal stipulation (also repealed in 1778) had enabled an eldest son, upon conforming to the Church of Ireland, to reduce his catholic father to an estate for his life only, with the permanent, heritable rights to the property given over immediately to the son. "By this part of the Law, the tenure and value of a Roman Catholick, in his real property, is not only rendered extremely limited, and altogether precarious" – which to Burke's way of thinking would be bad enough – "but the paternal power in all such families is so very much enervated, that it may well be considered as entirely taken away" (*Writings and Speeches* 438). Since, to Burke, paternal power within the family forms the foundation for social order, the penal laws are not merely out of step with the needs of empire, but directly subversive of them. The new

conditions of hegemonic control in the late eighteenth-century empire require that discipline begin at home: the rebellion of sons against their catholic fathers, which the penal statutes explicitly encourage, is counter to the interests of patriarchal authority, in the family and in the state.

Unsurprisingly, Burke is also especially concerned in the "Tracts" about keeping unruly wives in check and indicts the penal laws, "not satisfied with calling upon Children to revolt against their father" (*Writings and Speeches* 440), for breaching patriarchal control in this particular as well. A newly conforming wife and mother, by act of law, could gain greater authority over her dependent children, who might be taken from their father's custody for education in their new faith; catholic fathers would, however, remain responsible for financially maintaining those children until they came of age. While Burke acknowledges that "the Case is exactly similar" (*Writings and Speeches* 441) if the father conforms, since the nonconforming mother would then lose her children to him, he looses his rhetorical ire only on the abrogation of paternal rights and the potential rise in feminine power:

> . . . if the Wife should chuse to embrace the protestant religion, from that moment she deprives her husband, (whether she will or no) not only of all management of all his Children, but even of that satisfaction in their society, which is, perhaps, the only indemnification, a parent can receive for the many heavy cares and sollicitudes [*sic*], which attend that anxious relation . . . if she may, whenever she pleases, subtract the Children from his obedience and protection she must, by that hold, acquire one of the strongest sources of power and superiority over her husband. (*Writings and Speeches* 440–41)

The penal laws thus err again in granting power to those who should be legally as well as morally, politically, and socially subordinate; in seeking to encourage conformity to one arm of the state, the established church, they undermine the power of another, the patriarchal family. To reduce or limit a husband's coercive power over his wife and their children, or his other property, prevents the establishment of proper masculine authority: and so, in Blakemore's words, "the Popery Laws turn both wife and children against the father by suborning them with the very paternal power that has been appropriated."[30] Under such laws, the condition of catholic Ireland proleptically figures that of revolutionary France, with Irish wives and sons holding the powers of usurpation in their very own hands.

By eliminating religion as a disability, Burke thus hoped to reinvest power in Irish catholic men, not as catholics, but *as men*, who would thereby become full sharers in political power and full enforcers of

imperial security. Religious disabilities had deleterious domestic effects insofar as they prevented reproduction of the patriarchal family norm; moreover, they kept catholic eyes turned toward France and away from domestic (British) ties, while they made Irish protestants unduly suspicious of their catholic countrymen, and so more likely to sympathize with co-religionists abroad than with catholic neighbors at home. Burke's argument for repeal of the laws in the "Tracts" thus rests, as would his case in the *Reflections*, on his appeal to the domestic affections, with "domestic" bearing in this case both a familial and a national valence. Burke entreats protestants to put their nation, conceived across sectarian lines, first:

> . . . a number of persons['] minds are so formed, that they find the communion of Religion to be a close and an endearing tie, and their Country to be no bond at all; to whom common altars are a better relation than common habitations and a common civil interest; whose hearts are touched with the distresses of foreigners . . . But to transfer humanity from its natural basis, our legitimate and home-bred connections; to lose all feeling for those who have grown up by our sides, in our eyes, of the benefit of whose cares and labours we have partaken from our birth; and meretriciously to hunt abroad after foreign affections; is such a disarrangement of the whole system of our duties, that I do not know whether benevolence so displaced is not almost the same thing as destroyed, or what effect bigotry could have produced that is more fatal to society. (*Writings and Speeches* 461)

By the removal of catholic disabilities, all Irishmen would recognize what they held in common rather than what separated and differentiated them: "legitimate and home-bred connections" – growing up together, sharing a common national identity, being both Irish and British – should take natural precedence over "foreign affections." By recasting the relationship between Irish catholic and protestant men in these terms, and so seeking to produce across religious lines the fraternal bonds that Benedict Anderson's work posits as fundamental to nation-formation, Burke encourages the growth of domestic alliances, familial affections, and the homosocial bonds of citizenship as one masculinist solution to national and imperial fragmentation.[31]

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of Burke's analysis in shaping liberal discourse on Ireland in the nineteenth century: it takes hold formally and ideologically in the literary fictions of Edgeworth and Owenson, and in the political fictions of Mill, Arnold, and other Victorian intellectuals. While it has been the fashion in some quarters to

dismiss Burke for the positions he took, his writings should be central to any investigation of English fictions about Ireland if only because he looked steadily at the causes of catholic Irish disaffection and located them not in essentializing concepts of race or religion, but in the damages done to the many in the interests of the few: the penal laws "divided the nation into two distinct bodies, without common interest, sympathy or connexion; one of which bodies was to possess *all* the franchises, *all* the property, *all* the education" (*Writings and Speeches* 597). Burke's rhetoric may well be deliberately exaggerated here: historians debate the extent to which the laws were actively enforced, and his own arguments tend to minimize the impact of denominational splits among protestants and differing class interests among catholics by emphasizing a binary or sectarian division. Yet his focus on the concrete material and social deprivations sanctioned and forwarded by the penal laws provides an important historical context for reading those representations that follow. For if, by the standards some subsequent writers were to deploy, Ireland's differences and deficiencies appeared intractable or irremediable, Burke argued that those differences – or perceptions of the Irish as different – were in good part historically produced by English rule; he claimed that economic and political disabilities determined the national character and conduct of the Irish, not the other way around, and resulted in perpetual civil unrest. The very circumstances that Burke construes as producing Irish disaffection and difference – sometimes conveniently forgotten, sometimes strategically remembered by his nineteenth-century heirs – would be represented in many subsequent texts as attributable only to the racial, national, gendered character of the Irish themselves.

When Burke looked at Ireland from his imperial vantage point, he saw Irish vulnerability to France and to sectarian conflict stemming from disaffection below, exploitation above, and especially from the absence of a stabilizing middle. The lack of a powerful catholic landed class that could command widespread loyalty and so take a share in ruling the nation meant that no colonized native stratum mediated between rulers and ruled; as a result, the English colonial system had not solicited what Whelan calls "the crucial bonding force that gave political systems their endurance – the affection of the people who lived under them."[32] In this absence or lack we may also read what has been taken as one emblem of Ireland's difference from England, an absence with considerable consequences for Irish politics and economics, and for nineteenth-century representations of Ireland: there was no Irish middle

class to do the ideological dirty work of securing consent to rule from above in exchange for a measure of social authority.[33] Prescribing assimilation rather than conquest, consensual rule over coercive legislation, the Burkean paradigm for attaching Ireland to England required the development of ideological instruments that would promote these ends, arts of peace rather than of war, of influence instead of domination: in the revolutionary 1790s in Ireland, amidst the struggle for political representation and reform waged largely by and for men, it is perhaps not surprising that such work fell to protestant women. Burke's project finds its ideological home in the feminine cultural sphere of the novel, and especially in the hands of Maria Edgeworth.

The Burkean view of the unruly family as source and site of social and political disorder thus provides my heuristic key to Edgeworth's similarly conceived representation of Irish life before the Union in *Castle Rackrent* (1800) as riddled by the failure of a native Irish patriarchy properly to propagate itself. In its anglicizing discourse on language, and its representations of gender, class, and national formations as they shape and are shaped by matters of inheritance and property, *Castle Rackrent* exhibits a formal and thematic drive to represent a version of what has been in Ireland, "before the year 1782," that also hints at what should be, after the upheavals of 1798. Adhering to a Burkean paradigm rather than "[querying] the basis of the colonial relationship itself,"[34] *Castle Rackrent* locates the historical disruptions and discontinuities of Irish life within the fractured family whose history it emplots: like Burke, Edgeworth understands Ireland as necessary to an imperial Great Britain, albeit subordinate to it. In the novel's representation of Ireland under the penal system, we will see as well how the attempt to consolidate colonial rule requires the representation of at least some of the competing elements that most threaten its hegemonic aim.

In recent years, critical attention to *Castle Rackrent* has largely and effectively focused on its colonial politics; in the effort to locate both its author and its primary narrator in relation to the story the novel tells, the ambiguities of Thady Quirk's voice and position have been especially scrutinized. Some critics interpret Thady as a willing conspirator against the last of the Rackrents rather than as a loyal if short-sighted devotee of what he calls "the family." Tom Dunne describes Thady as "a Caliban in the guise of a quaint stage-Irish Ariel, his devious and false servility a direct product of the colonial system, and destined, through his crucial aid for his son, to be its nemesis"; Robert Tracy likewise claims that "Thady is not naive," but rather "well aware that the more

foolishly the Rackrents behave, the more he and his family will prosper."[35] Also assigning a subversive agency to Thady's acts and consciousness, other critics read his designs as challenging those they attribute to his creator, representing Edgeworth's project, by contrast with Thady's, as a deliberate effort to clear away the crumbling ground of the eighteenth-century Irish order so as to introduce in its place a rational and enlightened alternative to misrule. Terming her fiction "not an analysis but a symptom of the colonial problem," and reading her *oeuvre* as "documents in the 'civilizing mission' of the English to the Irish," Deane in particular ascribes to Edgeworth a colonizing aim.[36] My reading of Edgeworth's position suggests, rather, that we need to historicize her work within the context provided by the Burkean reading of eighteenth-century Ireland. In that frame, we may assess it as an effort to construct a mediating stance that would bridge the gap between what had been and what she thought could be: a colonial project, to be sure, but one that is defined against both those that preceded it and some of those contemporary with it.

The contours of Edgeworth's project are shaped in good part by her family's anomalous position as liberal Anglo-Irish landlords in late eighteenth-century Ireland. Unlike the absentees whose indifference to their Irish tenants Edgeworth was strongly to criticize in such later works as *Ennui* (1809) and *The Absentee* (1812), her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, had returned to Ireland from England in 1782 – an auspicious year for those with patriot dreams of renovating Ireland – "with a firm determination," in his words, "to dedicate the remainder of my life to the improvement of my estate, and to the education of my children; and farther, with the sincere hope of contributing to the melioration of the inhabitants of the country, from which I drew my subsistence."[37] Because the Edgeworths understood themselves to be a breed apart from their improvident and uncaring ancestors, on whose history Maria drew in writing *Castle Rackrent*, Richard took it upon himself to correct the wrongs that had been done to his estate and his tenants in a spirit of benevolent paternalism.[38] In this endeavor, as in many literary ones, Edgeworth served as her father's assistant, and ultimately his successor, carrying on his program until she was well into her seventies.

That program, enacted in both estate management and literary representation, clearly located the Edgeworths in a minority position within their own class in the 1790s. Marilyn Butler characterizes them by contrast with other landed protestants as "willing in principle to accept Catholic emancipation, and to vote with various degrees of